

Philadelphia, PA— With the struggling economy threatening many industries nationwide, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) briefed 150 leaders from the nation's oldest and largest pediatric hospital in the nation about actions required to support the availability and affordability of health care. Speaking at the Children Hospital of Philadelphia's (CHOP's) bimonthly leadership meeting, the Congressman particularly emphasized the difficulty that medical students would encounter in paying for necessary education in certain fields and the potential that doctors would accept fewer patients who receive Medicare and Medicaid because those programs pay less. —

“A comprehensive effort is needed to address the lack of access to quality care for millions of Americans in our current system of providing health coverage, but we also must recognize the immediate problems caused by our current financial crisis,” said Congressman Sestak. “In these difficult times, people living in and around my District are fortunate to have close proximity to facilities operated by CHOP, which is ranked as one of the world's leading pediatric research institutions and has done research that will lead to nearly \$1.2 billion in annual healthcare cost savings by 2020.”

Another of the specific concerns articulated by the Congressman was that the fewer number and higher interest rates of student loans would influence medical students in their selection of a specialty area, specifically causing further declines in the already diminishing supply of primary care physicians, who are paid less on average. The number of graduates who selected primary care residencies declined 50% between 1997 and 2005 and a 2008 American Journal of Medicine study demonstrated that within a population of 775,000, an increase from 35 percent to 40 percent in the number of primary care physicians could reduce hospital admissions by 2,500 per year, save \$23 million and reduce the number of surgeries by 2,500 per year.

To deal with the prospect that doctors would accept fewer Medicare and Medicaid patients, many of whom are now struggling even more financially, the Congressman advocated for fixing the formula that determines how doctors are reimbursed for their services through Medicare (Sustainable Growth Rate). Approximately 33 percent of CHOP's patients are covered by Medicaid. While Congressman Sestak strongly supported passage of H.R. 6331, the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act, which temporarily prevented a 10.6 percent Medicare physician pay cut, he stressed that Congress cannot simply continue to pass emergency patches, but must permanently fix the Sustainable Growth Rate formula.

In addition, the Congressman expressed his gratitude to all of the employees of CHOP, which served more than one million children in the last year and ranked second nationally in pediatric research funding. He provided an update on work in Congress to increase resources dedicated to pediatric cancer. The Caroline Pryce Walker Conquer Childhood Cancer Act, which he helped pass as a cosponsor, directed \$30 million to medical research and treatment of pediatric cancers, ensured patients and families would have access to the current treatments and information regarding pediatric cancers, established a population-based national childhood cancer database, and promoted public awareness of pediatric cancers.

Congressman Sestak has made health care a top priority, working to increase services for small businesses, seniors, children, veterans, and hospitals. He has worked to pass a ten percent increase in funding for Community Health Centers, legislation that offers grants for small businesses that need assistance to provide affordable coverage to their employees, and a health care tax credit that covers 85 percent of costs for workers' families displaced by trade actions. Through the appropriations process, the Congressman advocated for and won \$316,000 for a new regional Burn Treatment Center at Crozer-Chester Medical Center. Furthermore, the Congressman has emphasized the need to enhance the care given to the men and women who defend our nation, helping pass a bill that allocates \$600 million for new initiatives for mental health and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

"The ultimate goal must be to provide quality, affordable health care to all Americans," said Congressman Sestak. "I am watching closely the results of the system enacted in Massachusetts, where the state government worked in a bipartisan way to mandate participation in the health care system to drive down costs, and help small businesses by allowing them to band together as large bargaining units to negotiate lower premiums from private insurers. After its first year, a survey found that the system nearly halved the number of adults without coverage from about 13 percent to seven percent. It is this kind of bipartisan approach that we need to take as we enter a new Congress to find viable solutions. We cannot accept that any American is unable to afford health care."

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.

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